

'Meeting Hangovers' Are Draining Your Team. Here's How to Cure Them

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Exhaustion. Mental fatigue. Difficulty concentrating. Irritability. Dreading your next calendar appointment.

Nobody likes showing up to work with a hangover. But these days, you don't need a long night of drinking to feel the effects.

Instead, you might be suffering from a meeting hangover, the lingering exhaustion, disengagement, and productivity drain that follow an unproductive meeting.

Studies show that 28% of workplace meetings leave employees feeling drained, with more than 90% of workers experiencing meeting hangovers at least occasionally. Nearly half (47%) report feeling less engaged with their work afterward, while more than half say these hangovers disrupt their workflow and productivity.

Meetings are a double-edged sword. Despite their pitfalls, they remain the most common form of workplace communication. In fact, research suggests face-to-face meetings are more effective for idea generation and task absorption than video calls. In other words, meetings aren't going anywhere.

But leaders can take charge—ensuring meetings are productive, efficient, and, most importantly, not hangover-inducing. Here are the strategies I use as CEO of Jotform.

Set a concise agenda

If you've ever walked into a grocery store for a few essentials and walked out with a cart full of snacks, you understand the power of having a clear list. The same principle applies to meetings.

At Jotform, meeting agendas are indispensable. We also believe in minimizing meetings. By preparing an agenda, you can determine if a meeting is really necessary.

If an asynchronous method—like an email, Slack message, or shared document—can achieve the same outcome faster, we opt for that instead. But when a real-time discussion is necessary, such as brainstorming solutions to an ongoing issue, a meeting is the right call.

An agenda also ensures that only the necessary people are in the room. If someone isn't essential to the conversation, they can contribute asynchronously—perhaps by answering follow-up questions afterward.

As a result, we have fewer, more efficient meetings and fewer meeting hangovers.

Keep the conversation on track

"The Big Apple Circus in New York once featured a team of Chinese jugglers who could each spin eight plates at a time on the ends of long, slender sticks. Interviewing is a similar balancing act," writes professor and journalist Helen Benedict.

The same is true for leading a meeting. You're listening, observing, processing, and asking questions—all while ensuring the discussion stays focused.

Benedict's strategy for interviews is to arrive with a list of questions and stick to them religiously—even if it means cutting off tangents and redirecting the conversation. "It may not be smooth conversational technique," she writes, "but it can save me hours of listening to off-the-track waffling."

Running a meeting requires the same discipline. If a discussion starts veering off course, our meeting leaders are tasked with gently steering it back. If we're stuck on a point with no resolution, we note it and ask participants to revisit it later rather than letting it derail the agenda.

This helps us conclude meetings on time—and sometimes early. If an hour-long meeting ends up taking 45 minutes, there's no need to fill the space with white noise.

Recap with clear deliverables

Finally, we never leave a meeting without a clear recap of who's responsible for what.

Outlining deliverables ensures that nothing falls through the cracks—tasks don't get lost, and responsibilities don't blur or overlap. This is where I've found AI agents make a huge difference.

Combined with AI-powered note-taking apps, agents can generate concise summaries, highlight key takeaways tailored to each participant's role, and compile a clear action-item list. This accountability creates a sense of shared leadership and boosts team effectiveness.

An AI agent can also streamline follow-ups by creating a separate document with action items and deadlines, time-stamping key moments so participants can revisit discussions without replaying the entire meeting, and even drafting follow-up emails—leaving nothing more to do than review and hit send.

With these tasks automated, meeting participants can stay focused on the actual substance of the meeting rather than getting bogged down in administrative details. This also cuts down the total time spent on meetings.

Despite technological advancements, the time that workers spend in unproductive meetings has doubled since 2019—to five hours per week. With automation and the above strategies, employees can spend less time on meetings, experience fewer “hangovers,” and feel energized to take on more meaningful work.